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**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MATERNAL UNCLE AND GRANDFATHER  
IN ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREECE AND EARLY BYZANTIUM**

It is a striking fact that in many patriarchal and patrilineal societies a special relationship exists between a mother's brother (MoBr) and his sister's son (SiSo), and between the mother's father (MoFa) and the daughter's son (DaSo).<sup>1)</sup> Social anthropologists have been studying this relationship for more than fifty years.<sup>2)</sup> Some hundred years ago Bachofen drew particular attention to this tie.<sup>3)</sup> The boldness of Bachofen's theories condemned his studies to the dusty shelves of libraries,<sup>4)</sup> but his analysis of the avunculate and the importance that was attached to the maternal grandfather is still of interest. He restricted himself to a few examples from Greek mythology, Homer, Pindar, and Thucydides; but the material is certainly richer and will reward further examination. The period over which we can follow the avunculate, moreover, can be extended to early Byzantium. My investigation continues an earlier study in which I surveyed the Indo-European evidence.<sup>5)</sup> I found that the special position of the maternal (as against paternal) uncle and grandfather,

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1) This article is an expanded version of my contribution to a panel on kinship at the 1981 Am.Philol.Assoc. Convention in San Francisco. For information and comments I would like to thank W.Burkert, Richard Buxton, Fritz Graf, Albert Henrichs, and Charles Segal who also corrected the English. I use the following abbreviation:

Davies = J.Davies, Athenian Propertied Families (Oxford 1971).

2) See especially A.R.Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function* in Primitive Society (London 1952) 15-31 (1924<sup>1</sup>); J.Goody, The Mother's Brother and the Sister's Son in West Africa, *J.Royal Anthropol.Soc.* 89 (1959) 61-88; L. de Heusch, The Debt of the Maternal Uncle, *Man* 9 (1974) 609-619; F.Martens, A propos de l'oncle maternel, *L' Homme* 15 (1975) 155-175; A.Kuper, Radcliffe-Brown, Junod and the Mother's Brother in South Africa, *Man* 1 (1976) 111-115; A.Adler, Avunkulat et mariage matrilatéral en Afrique noire, *L' Homme* 16 (1976) 7-27 (with the response by L. de Heusch, *ibidem*, 29-47).

3) J.J.Bachofen, *Antiquarische Briefe*, Vols. I, II (Basel 1880, 1885), reprinted in *Johann Jakob Bachofens Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VIII, ed. by J. Dörmann and W.Strasser (Basel/Stuttgart 1966) 5-414. This volume contains some further hitherto unpublished "antiquarian" letters on this subject, but Bachofen's legacy to the university library of Basel still contains papers amounting to about ten thousand pages which may never see the light of the day.

4) Except by Friedrich Engels, Bachofen was overlooked not only by the anthropologists mentioned in note 2, but also by E.Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes I* (Paris 1969) 223-237. For Bachofen and matriarchy, see most recently S.Pembroke, *Woman in Charge: the Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy*, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967) 1-36; H.J.Heinrichs (ed.), *Materialien zu Bachofens "Mutterrecht"* (Frankfurt 1975); U.Wesel, *Der Mythos von Matriarchat* (Frankfurt 1980); P.Vidal-Naquet, *Le Chasseur noir* (Paris 1981) 267-288.

5) J.Bremmer, *Avunculate and Fosterage*, *Journ. Indo-European Studies* 4 (1976) 65-78.

which had been noted among many non-literate peoples, also occurred among the Indo-Europeans. Subsequent studies of the Roman, Germanic, and Celtic material corroborated my conclusion.<sup>6)</sup> The present article will present in detail the Greek evidence. Being the first to do so since Bachofen it can hardly lay claim to completeness. We may safely assume that more evidence of this nature lies hidden in all kinds of Greek texts.

## I

In one of his still inspiring essays Louis Gernet discussed the phenomenon of fosterage, the education of boys outside the parental home.<sup>7)</sup> It is clear from Gernet's material that in all cases in which a family relationship existed or was specified, it was the maternal grandfather - never the paternal one<sup>8)</sup> - who raised the child. In some cases the MoFa voluntarily undertook to raise the boy; Iphidamas reached maturity in the house of his MoFa in Thrace (Iliad XI.221f.);<sup>9)</sup> Neoptolemos grew up on the island of Scyros at the court of Achilles' father-in-law Lykomedes;<sup>10)</sup> Theseus was raised by his MoFa Pittheus in Troizen.<sup>11)</sup> In other cases the stay with the MoFa was occasioned by sheer necessity. When the Messenian king Kresphontes was murdered, his youngest son Aipyrtos managed to escape to his MoFa, the Arcadian king Kypselos, who raised him.<sup>12)</sup> Similarly, Adrastus had to flee to his MoFa, the king of Sicyon (Schol. Pind. Nem. 9.30a).

In general, fosterage took place between the end of infancy and the beginning of adulthood, when the young aristocrat returned home for the last puberty rites, sometimes his investiture rites. In a number of cases, however, the DaSo stayed on at his grandfather's court and succeeded to the throne. It seems likely that in most of these examples the king had no son of his own. Herodotus (7.61; also see Apoll. 2.4.5) tells us that Perseus left his son by Andromeda with her father Kepheus, since the latter had no

6) Roman: J.Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters* (Princeton 1983). Germanic: R.H. Bremmer, *The Importance of Kinship: Uncle and Nephew in 'Beowulf'*, *Amsterdamer Beiträge z. älteren Germanistik* 15 (1980) 21-38. Celtic: G.Guastella, *I parentalia come testo antropologico: l'avuncolato nel mondo celtico e nella famiglia di Ausonio*, *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* (Pisa) 4 (1980) 97-124.

7) L.Gernet, *Droit et société dans la grèce ancienne* (Paris 1955) 19-28. For Indo-European parallels, see Bremmer (note 5); add *Orkneyinga Saga* 13; *Geoffrey of Monmouth Historia Regum Britanniae* 2.4; *Hálfðanar saga svarta* c.3.

8) In the extended family the paternal grandfather would be in the home. E.Risch, *Betrachtungen zu den indogermanischen Verwandtschaftsnamen*, *Mus.Helv.* 1 (1944, 115-122) 119 = *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin/New York 1981) 651 observed that there is no Indo-European term for paternal grandfather: he is just the πατήρ.

9) I.Espermann, *Antenor, Theano, Antenoriden* (Meisenheim 1980) 74f. completely overlooked the parallels for this fosterage.

10) *Il.* XIX. 326f.; *Soph. Ph.* 239-244; *Strabo* 9.5.16; *Apollod. Ep.* 5.11.

11) *Plut. Thes.* 4; *Paus.* 1.27.7.

12) For all sources, see O.Musso, *Euripide: Cresfonte* (Milan 1974).

male off-spring. Similarly, Leukippos, the king of Sicyon, bequeathed the throne to Peratos, his DaSo, because he only had a daughter (Paus. 2.5.7). In Sicyon Polybos gave the throne to his DaSo Adrastus, who in turn left the throne to his DaSo Diomedes.<sup>13)</sup> In these cases the DaSo apparently was believed to succeed his grandfather at his death, but in Thebes Cadmos gave the throne to his DaSo Pentheus when still alive,<sup>14)</sup> and a similar situation is presupposed in Euripides' second Hippolytos, where Theseus evidently received the Trozenian throne during Pittheus' life.<sup>15)</sup> Finally, Hippothous, who had been exposed after his mother had been impregnated by Poseidon, requested the kingdom of his MoFa Kerkyon as his rightful inheritance from Theseus (Hyg. Fab. 187).

This right of the DaSo to the throne seems to be reflected also in those legends in which a king exposes a DaSo who is prophesied to succeed him one day. The best known Greek case is perhaps Perseus,<sup>16)</sup> but outside Greece we also have Cyrus,<sup>17)</sup> Romulus and Remus,<sup>18)</sup> Gilgamesh (Ael. NA. 12.21), and

13) Adrastus: Her. 5.67; Menaichmos FGrH 131 F 10; Paus. 2.6.6; Schol. Il. II. 572. Diomedes: Eustathius 238, 22-26. Gernet (note 7) 24 rightly concluded from Il. V.412 that Diomedes, like Iphidamas (above), had married his maternal aunt. Gernet, *Anthropologie de la grèce antique* (Paris 1968) 344-359 (*Mariages de tyrans*, 1954<sup>1</sup>) and J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et société en grèce ancienne* (Paris 1974) 73f. [with more examples of the MoSi/SiSo marriage] consider this early Greek matrimonial strategy as typically aristocratic. However, in Classical Greece aristocracies tended to avoid this type of marriage. P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge 1977) 58-71 has shown that in uncertain political and economic situations families tend to direct their efforts towards the maintenance of the family, not its expansion. The uncle/aunt - niece/nephew marriages therefore strongly point to the Dark Ages when these endogamic strategies will have been shared by aristocrats and peasants alike.

14) Eur. Bacch. 43, 213. F. Vian, *Les origines de Thèbes* (Paris 1963) 180 (who is followed by J. Roux on Eur. Bacch. 43) unnecessarily suggests that Pentheus only acts as a regent.

15) As is observed by W. S. Barrett, Euripides: *Hippolytos* (Oxford 1964) 33, 157. In order to avoid competition with Phaedra's children, Theseus sent Hippolytos to Troizen to be raised by his MoFa and to succeed him to the throne (Paus. 1.22.2). According to Diod. Sic. 4.62, Hippolytos was educated by Theseus' MoBr's (below §2).

16) For Perseus, see more recently M. Werre-de Haas, *Aeschylus' Dictyulci* (Leiden 1961) 5-10 (with all literary evidence); J. H. Oakley, *Danae and Perseus on Seriphos*, *AJA* 86 (1982) 111-115 (with full archeological bibliography).

17) Her. 1.107-122; Just. 1.4-6; G. Widengren, *La légende royale de l'Iran antique*, in *Hommages à G. Dumézil* (Brussel 1960) 225-237; A. Alföldi, *Die Struktur des voretruskischen Römerstaates* (Heidelberg 1974) 137-141.

18) The literature on the legend of Romulus and Remus is extensive, see most recently G. Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königskindes Kyros und Romulus* (Meisenheim 1964); H. Strasburger, *Zur Sage von der Gründung Roms*, *SB Heidelberg, Philo.-hist. Klasse* 1968, 5 (Heidelberg 1968); J. Puhvel, *Remus et frater*, *History of Religions* 15 (1975) 146-157; Alföldi (note 17), 114-119; B. Liou-Gille, *Cultes "héroïques" romains* (Paris 1980) 135-207; Bremmer, *The Suodales of Poplios Valesios*, *ZPE* 47 (1982) 133-147.

**Habis.**<sup>19)</sup> This particular type occurs only in classical authors, although exposure legends are found from China to Southern Africa.<sup>20)</sup>

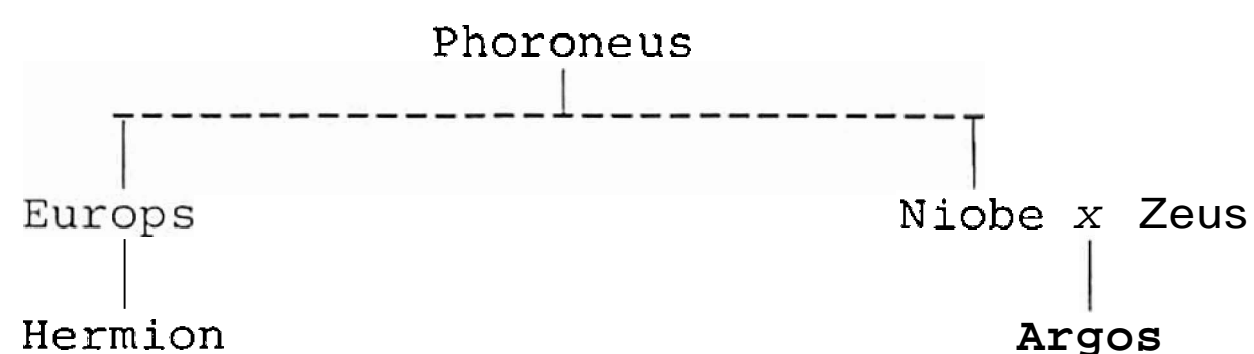
In the examples mentioned so far the DaSo succeeded to the throne because the MoFa did not have a (living) son. In addition, there are two more cases where the DaSo inherited the throne, although a living, legal son existed. These instances are highly interesting since apparently later tradition felt compelled to explain the particular reason why the existing son was passed over, thus showing that it considered this succession an oddity. The local Trozenian author Herophanes, whom Jacoby dates in the early Empire, observed that Hermion, the founder of Hermione, could never have been the son of a legitimate son of Phoroneus, but that his father must have been one of Phoroneus' bastards; otherwise the Argive throne would never have gone to Argos, the son of Phoroneus' daughter Niobe (Paus. 2.16.1).<sup>21)</sup>

A similar concern appears from a Homeric scholion which relates a William Tell-like legend to explain why Sarpedon succeeded his MoFa Bellerophon whereas Glaukos, the son of Bellerophon's son, went to Troy (Il. VI. 199f.).<sup>22)</sup> In the last instance Bachofen naturally saw a survival of the great matriarchal times, since Herodotus 7.3 relates that the Lycians took their names from their mother. But Simon Pembroke has definitely shown from inscriptions that the Lycians did no such thing.<sup>23)</sup> The Greeks, on the other hand, used the metronymic to denote natural children.<sup>24)</sup> Herodotus' report therefore most

19) Just. 44.4; J.C.Bermejo Barrera, La function real en la mitologia Tartesica. Gargaris, Habis y Aristeo, Habis 9 (1978) 215-232.

20) See the extensive surveys in Binder (note 18) 123-250, summarized with some additions and corrections by Binder in K.Ranke (ed.), Enzyklopädie des Märchens I (Berlin/New York 1977) 1048-1066; B.Lewis, The Sargon Legend (Cambridge, Mass. 1980) 149-272.

21) Paus. 2.34.5 = Herophanes FGrH 605 F 1. We have thus the following stemma:



22) Schol. Il. XII.101; Eustathius 894,36. For the comparison with William Tell, see S.Pembroke apud H.Erbse, Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem, Vol. III (Berlin 1974) 319. Add to Pembroke's bibliography: M.Beck, Wilhelm Tell: Sage oder Geschichte, Deutsches Archiv 36 (1980) 1-24.

23) S.Pembroke, Last of the Matriarchs, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient 8 (1965) 217-247.

24) For the Greek use of the metronymic, see most recently O.Masson, La plus ancienne inscription crétoise, in W.Meid et al. (eds.), Studies in Greek, Italic and Indo-European Linguistics offered to Leonard R.Palmer (Innsbruck 1976) 169-172 and BCH 99 (1975) 221f. For later periods, see K.Kyrri, Kypriaka kai Ammochoosteia meletemata kai dokima (Ammochoostos, Cyprus 1967) 143-161; N.P.Andriotis, Die mittel- und neugriechischen Metronymica, in Atti e Memorie del VII Congresso Intern. di Scienze Onomastiche, Vol. III (Florence 1963) 59-66.



likely derives from the Greek tendency to picture their neighbours and their customs as the exact opposite of their own.<sup>25)</sup> Our evidence shows that a maternal grandfather could be greatly interested in his grandson, but none of the texts used so far relates anything about the sentiments involved. Regarding the mythological material, we only have the case of Perseus, supposedly very eager to see his Mofa Akrisios (who had exposed him in a chest together with his mother Danae) "to show him kindness in word and deed" (Paus. 2.16.2). We may suspect a similar concern in the Salaminitian Skiros who, when Theseus sailed to Crete, provided the pilot because his Daso was one of the hostages (Philochochos FGrG 328 F 111).

For historical times our sources are somewhat more informative. And even though all episodes may have not actually happened as reported, they are still indicative of what people expected of a Mofa/Daso relationship. The sage Bias of Priene died in the lap of his Daso (Diog. Laert. 1.87). When Herodotus (3.50) relates the story of Perikander's sons and their reception by their Mofa, he adds that they were treated very kindly, "as was only natural, they being the sons of his own daughter." We find nearly the same expression in Isaen's oration on the estate of Ciron (8.15): the young men who claim to be the sons of Ciron's daughter relate the many activities their **pasodnds** grandfather shared with them, "as was natural, seeing that we were the sons of his daughter." And in Lysias' Against Diogenes the speaker reproaches Diogenes, who was both paternal uncle and maternal grandfather (!), with the maltreatment of his daughter's children whereas he never calls attention to the fact that Diogenes was also the paternal uncle (Lys. 30.16, 24, 27); maltreatment by the paternal uncle apparently was not very shocking (below § 2). Finally, we cannot fail to observe that Euripides pictures the relation of Cadmos and Pentheus as one of special closeness, where the Mofa deeply loves his Daso.<sup>26)</sup> Similarly, he calls the *dyvóc Hippolytus* the *dyvóc mtréwc naibéputa*, in this way stressing the tie between the young man and his maternal great-grandfather.<sup>27)</sup> Since we do not find a single passage that stresses the relationship of a grandson with his paternal grandfather, we may infer provisionally that a Greek's relationship with his daughter's children was better than with his son's children.

25) For this tendency, see Pembroke (note 4); M. Detienne, *Dionysos mis à mort* (Paris 1977) 133-160; F. Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote* (Paris 1980); C. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981) 29f.

26) Eur. Bacch. 181, 250-54, 1318ff.; C. Segal, *Pentheus on the Couch and on the Grid*, *Class. World* 72 (1978) 129-148 and *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton 1982) 177ff.

27) Eur. Hipp. 11, cf. C. Segal, *Shame and Purity in Euripides' Hippolytus*, *Hermes* 98 (1970) 278-299. Barrett (note 15) 157 totally neglected the institution of fosterage.

## II

We will return below (§ 3) to this problem and close our discussion of the MoFa with an example that brings us to the MoBr, the maternal uncle. When *Odysseus* is recognised by his scar, we hear the story of his youth. Just after *Odysseus'* birth his MoFa visited his house where Eurykleia put the new-born baby on the grandfather's knees. Autolykos gave *Odysseus* his name and asked his parents to send him to his house when he had reached puberty in order that *Odysseus* may receive presents (Od. 19.401.412). Gernet saw in this episode a later development in which fosterage proper had already disappeared but the tie with the MoFa still remained in force.<sup>28)</sup> This particular visit, however, occurs at the moment of reaching puberty, whereas in the case of fosterage the boy always left his MoFa when he had reached puberty.

Gernet, moreover, neglected an important aspect of *Odysseus'* visit. Twice during the episode the sojourn is defined more precisely as taking place with Autolykos and his sons, *Odysseus'* maternal uncles (Od. 19.394, 414, 418f.). Also, it is the uncles who accompany *Odysseus* on the fateful hunt in which he had received his scar.<sup>29)</sup> Similarly, during the Calydonian hunt Meleager was accompanied by the brothers of his mother Althaea.<sup>30)</sup> A third hunt is even more interesting since it implies a mistaken MoBr/SiSo relationship which nevertheless confirms our point. Theano was the foster mother of Boeotus and Aeolus, the natural sons of Melanippe, who regarded Theano as their true mother. However, when Theano had children of her own, she arranged to have her foster children killed by her own brothers. From Euripides' *Melanippe Desmotis* a messenger's description of the actual ambush, which took place during a hunt, has been preserved in a Berlin papyrus. When Aeolus and Boeotus recognised the attackers as their MoBr's (as they still erroneously thought), they exclaimed: "Brothers of our dear mother, what are you about, that we catch you slaying those whom you should treat so least of all? For God's sake do not so!"<sup>31)</sup>

In these cases the supervision by the MoBr most likely had an initiatory significance, as probably also in other cases where a SiSo accompanied his MoBr into war. I note two examples: the most important commander of the Myrmidonian fleet after Achilles was his SiSo Menesthios (Il. XVI. 173-176; Strabo 9.5.9). In the Delphic gymnasium - the place of education par excellence - Pausanias (10.10.2) saw among the statues of the commanders of the army

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28) Gernet (note 7), 26.

29) Od. 19.429-431. For the initiatory significance of the wound in the thigh, see Bremmer, *Heroes, Rituals and the Trojan War*, *Studi Storico-Religiosi* 2 (1978, 5-38) 10-13.

30) Il. IX. 529ff.; Bacch. 5.97ff.; F.Bömer on Ov.Met. 8.273 (with full bibliography). The initiatory significance of the hunt is well stressed by R.Lonis, *Guerre et religion en grèce à l'époque classique* (Paris 1979) 202.

31) Eur. fr. 495 N<sup>2</sup> = 664 Mette (*Lustrum* 23/24, 1981/82), tr. D.Page, *Greek Literary Papyri III* (Loeb), 114f. For the legend, see Hyg. Fab. 186.

that marched against Thebes besides Adrastus' one also that of his SiSo Hippomedon.<sup>32)</sup> The educational activity of the MoBr, however, was not restricted only to war. Bachofen opened his study of the avunculate with Daedalus' murder of his SiSo Talos. Apollodorus (3.15.8, tr. Frazer) gives the fullest account: "Daedalus had fled from Athens, because he had thrown down from the acropolis Talos, the son of his sister Perdix; for Talos was his pupil..."<sup>33)</sup>

We also have some other cases which are indicative of a good relationship between a MoBr and his SiSo. When Apollo wanted to persuade Hector he appeared in the shape of his MoBr Asios (Il. XVI. 717). At the end of the Trojan War Prism sent for his SiSo Eurypylos.<sup>34)</sup> Creon purified his SiSo Amphitryon of the killing of Electryon, and he helped him in his war against the Teleboans.<sup>35)</sup> Kypselos' son Holoaios accompanied the Heraclids to Messene where he installed his SiSo Aepyros (Paus. 8.5.7). Finally, when Atreus had killed Chrysippos, he fled to his SiSo Eurystheus in Mycenae (Thuc. 1.9.2). Against all these examples of a close tie with the MoBr we have only one example of a similar tie with the paternal uncle: Heracles and Iolaus.<sup>36)</sup>

The educational activity of the MoBr which is testified for mythological times survived into the historical period. Pindar twice mentions boys who gained important victories in the same contest as their maternal uncles.<sup>37)</sup> In the eighth Pythian (35-38) he tells us that in the wrestling matches Aristomenes followed in the steps of his *ματράδελφεοῦς* Theognetos who won at Olympia and Kleitomachos who was an Isthmian victor. From the fifth Nemean (41) and sixth Isthmian (57) we learn of the Aeginetan couple Pytheas and Phylakidas and their MoBr Euthymenos who all were victorious in the trial of strength. The connection can hardly be fortuitous, since we learn from the fourth Nemean (79-81) that Timasarchos asked Pindar for an ode on his deceased MoBr Callicles; and in the seventh Isthmian (24) Pindar sings that Strepsiades shares his glory with his homonymous uncle.

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32) According to some traditions Tydeus was the son of Periboia, the sister of Kapaneus: Apollod. 3.6.3; Paus. 9.8.7, 10.10.3; Hyg. Fab. 70. In the Germanic world the MoBr was regularly accompanied by his SiSo in battle, see Bremmer (note 6), 33 note 55; add *Hákonar saga qbda* c. 29; *Magnúss saga blinda* 7, 10. The initiatory role of the MoBr which is prominent in many Indo-European traditions - exempli gratia I mention the legend of Caeculus of Praeneste, the tale Peredur of the Welsh Mabinogion, and the Germanic *Vol-sungasaga* - deserves further investigation.

33) Cf. Ov. Met. 8.241 *huic* (Daedalus) *tradiderat ... docendam progeniem germana suam* (with Bömer ad loc. for full bibliography).

34) Tümpel, RE VI (1907) 1348 with all sources.

35) Apollod. 2.4.6; Schol.Lyc. 932.

36) Roscher, Mythol.Lex. II.1 (Leipzig 1890-97) 285-289 with all sources.

37) D.Roussel, *Tribu et cité* (Paris 1976) 52f. notes the importance of the maternal family in Pindar but neglects the importance of the MoBr's educational activities.



All these examples become more comprehensible if we assume that the MoBr had an active hand in his SiSo's education, and that for the young nephew the MoBr functioned as the model par excellence for imitation. This relationship also seems to have been a factor in the lives of some celebrated men: Bacchylides was the SiSo of Simonides,<sup>38)</sup> Aeschylus was the MoBr of the tragedian Philokles (TGrF 24 Philokles T 2), the orator Demochares was the SiSo of Demosthenes (Davies, p.142), Speusippos succeeded his MoBr Plato as head of the Academy,<sup>39)</sup> and, finally, Callimachus had a homonymous SiSo who was an ἐποποιός (Suda K 228). We have perhaps one other example. Besides the great Euripides, we have two other tragedians with the same name. Regarding the first (TGrF 16 Euripides I), it is said that he was "older than the famous one." Regarding the second (TGrF 17 Euripides II), the Suda (E 3694) informs us that he was τοῦ προτέρου ἀδελφιδοῦς. Snell (ad loc.) translates ἀδελφιδοῦς as filius fratris eius, but he may well have been a SiSo. We have seen several examples of poets being related to each other as MoBr and SiSo,<sup>40)</sup> and we also know that sometimes sons were named after their maternal uncle.<sup>41)</sup>

If it was natural that the MoBr served as the exemple for the boys during their youth and apparently also had an active hand in their education, it is understandable that this role could reflect itself in laws concerning adoption or guardianship. And indeed in the laws of Charondas the administration of the estate was entrusted to the father's family (below) but the upbringing of the orphans to the mother's family, which in practice must normally have meant the MoBr or MoFa (Diod. Sic. 12.15). In Syracuse, Dionysius II claimed that he was the legal guardian of the son of his half-sister Arete (Plat. Ep. 7.345C), and in Gortyn the maternal uncles were entrusted with the bringing up of an heiress (Gortyn Code VIII. 51ff., XII.13 Willets). In fact, we find this activity already attested in mythological times. The island of Thera was colonized by Procles and Eurysthenes together with their guardian MoBr Theras (Paus. 3.1.7, 4.3.4). Creon functioned as guardian and regent for Eteocles and Polyneices (Soph. OT. 1418).<sup>42)</sup>

38) For the evidence, see H.Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides I* (Leiden 1982) 6.

39) Plut. M.10D = M.I.Parente, *Speusippo: Frammenti* (Napoli 1980) F 6 = L.Tarán, *Speusippus of Athens* (Leiden 1981) T 25a; Plut. M. 491F-492A (F 5 Parente = T 24a Tarán; Diog. Laert. 3.4 (T 4 Tarán); Suid. Σ 928 (F 3 Parente = T 3 Tarán).

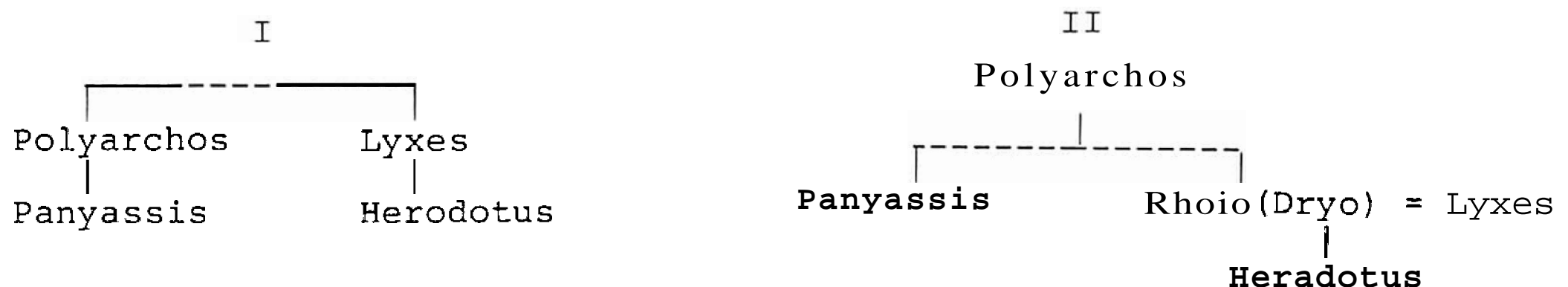
40) Besides the poetic couples mentioned, also note the couple Pacuvius (SiSo) and Ennius (MoBr): Plin. MH. 35.19.

41) Besides the already mentioned examples of Strepsiades and Callimachus, note also Cimon's son Peisianax (Davies, p.305), Dem. 39.32, 63.77. Naming practices are neglected in the studies mentioned in note 2, but among the American slaves nephews were regularly named after their maternal uncle, see H.Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York 1976) 200f. For a Germanic example, see Bremmer (note 6) 25.

42) A Germanic example: Haralds saga inn hárfagra c. 1.

In the fourth century we still find examples of a good relationship between MoBr and SiSo. When Aeschines (2.78) reminded the jury of his family history, he mentioned the political behavior of his father and his MoBr Cleoboulos, and concluded: "The sufferings of the city were therefore a household word with us, familiar to my ears." Andocides (3.29) proudly mentions that a permanent accord was established with the Great King thanks to the diplomacy of his MoBr Epilycus. In Demosthenes' *Against Olympiodorus Calistratus* did not risk coming into court and saying "unpleasant things of one who is a brother of my wife and the uncle of my children" (Dem. 48.8, tr. A.Murray, Loeb). Theomnestus, in the *Against Neaera*, related how he was reproached for not seeking vengeance for the injuries done to his sister's children (Dem. 59.12). And in Isaeus' third oration on the estate of Pyrrhus (3.26, 29f.) the maternal uncles of Pyrrhus all declared that they were summoned as witnesses to his wedding with the sister of Nicodemus. Finally, an example from Rhodes: the condottiere Mentor gave important commands to his SiSo (Diod. Sic. 16.52.4).

We even have cases where two men, because they were related and eminent in an (almost) identical field, were assumed to be MoBr and SiSo, whereas actually they were related in quite a different way. Regarding Panyassis and Herodotus, the *Suda* (Π 248) gives two different genealogies. According to one they were cousins; according to the other they were maternal uncle and nephew:



As Jacoby observed, the fact that in the second stemma the mother's name is mentioned is suspicious, as the only purpose served is determining the exact nature of Herodotus and Panyassis's relationship.<sup>43)</sup> Apparently, a later tradition considered the MoBr and SiSo's relationship as the more appropriate one for these two eminent authors.

Our second example is Pericles and Alcibiades. Alcibiades' mother was Pericles' cousin, but Diodorus (12.38.1), Valerius Maximus (3.1 ext. 1) and the *Suda* (A 1280) all call Pericles the maternal uncle of Alcibiades.<sup>44)</sup> The

43) Jacoby, RE Suppl. 2 (1913) 217. J.P.Tzschirner, *Panyasidis Halicarnas-sei Heracleadis Fragmenta* (Bratislava 1842) 14 combined the two traditions by making Dryo the sister of Panyassis. This is rightly rejected by V.J. Matthews, *Panyassis of Halikarnassos* (Leiden 1974) 10, but his main argument that an uncle/niece marriage was unlikely does not hold. Besides the examples adduced by Gernet and Vernant (note 13), see also Lys. 32.4; Is. 10.5; Dem. 44.10, 59.2, 22.

44) The whole problem has been misunderstood by P.J.Bicknell, *Studies in Athenian Politics and Genealogy* (Wiesbaden 1972) 79.

designation is absolutely wrong, but again, it is important that later traditions expressed the relationship between the two politicians in this particular way.

The evidence we have does not allow us to follow up this theme in later centuries.<sup>45)</sup> Yet, when in earlier Christian times the hagiographical biographies supply us again with detailed information about the saint's education, the role of the MoBr immediately appears to be prominent. Sabas, Euthymos, Kyriakos, Eusebios, Nicholas of Sion - all are educated by their MoBr.<sup>46)</sup> And we may perhaps even assume that this good relationship has lasted in some parts of Greece until the present time, for among the Sarakatsani of Northern Greece the MoBr is still the favourite uncle.<sup>47)</sup>

Against this evidence, we have not a single passage which stresses the good relationship of a person with his parental uncle. We noted already that in Lysias' *Against Diogeiton* the speaker never drew attention to the fact that Diogeiton was the paternal uncle, and we inferred from this silence that maltreatment by the paternal uncle was not very shocking. We have two more examples that there was not much love lost between FaBr and BrSo. Aeschines (1.103) tells us how Timarchos shamefully neglected his paternal uncle Arignotus, and Demosthenes mentions the bad treatment of Nicias by his BrSo Stephanos (Dern.45.70, cf. Davies, p.438). Plutarch (M.492D) even ends his essay on brotherly love with the exhortation: "It is an uncle's duty to rejoice and take pride in the fair deeds and honours and offices of a brother's sons and to help to give them an incentive etc. etc." Apparently, it was still not usual in his time that a paternal uncle was very concerned with his brother's sons.

How do we explain this preference for the SiSo. From Bachofen to modern social anthropologists, scholars have consistently and (I believe) rightly maintained that the secret of the close relationship lies in the close relationship between a sister and her brothers.<sup>48)</sup> Through her marriage a woman leaves

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45) But it is important to note that as soon as we have extensive information about someone, as is the case with Libanius, the prominent position of the maternal family is striking, cf. Lib. Or. 1. Libanius was even going to marry his MoBr's daughter (Or. 1.95), as was Andocides (1.117f.).

46) For these and other examples, see E.Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance 4e-7e siècles* (Paris 1977) 122-124. Note also the couple Marcianos/Alypius: Theodoretus Hist.Rel. 3.14, 18.

47) J.K.Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford 1964) 105.

48) For the brother-sister relationship, see, besides the anthropological literature mentioned in note 2, especially regarding Greece: Bachofen (ed. 1966), 157-186; M.Golden, *Aspects of Childhood in Classical Athens* (Diss. Toronto 1981) 267-285.

Although I am unable to judge the validity of their arguments, I want to point out that sociobiologists explain the special relationship with genetic arguments, cf. T.J.Garbády, *The uncle-nephew motif: new light on its origins and development*, Folklore 88 (1977) 220-235; J.A.Kurland, *Paternity, Mother's Brother and Human Society*, in N.A.Chagnon/W.Irons (eds.), *Evolutionary Biology and Human Social Behavior* (North Scituate, Mass. 1979) 145-180.

her own family and in a way surrenders herself to the mercy of her in-laws. In this situation her father and especially her brothers are her only support against the potential difficulties with her husband and kin. The care extended to the sister also extended to her children, and thus the sister would return to her brother when the husband had passed away.

From Lysias' saucy story about the struggle for the favours of a Plataean boy, we learn that Simon, when drunk, even dared to enter the women's rooms where the speaker's sister and his nieces lived (Lys. 3.6). Andocides was persuaded to testify against the Hermecopidae by his father's SiSo Charmides "who had been brought up with me in our home since boyhood."<sup>49)</sup> And in Isaeus' first oration (1.15) the speaker relates that after their guardian's death he and his brother were taken into the house of their MoBr who educated them, and, he claimed, even wanted to adopt them on his death-bed. We need not discuss this claim, but the idea will not have appeared improbable in itself to the jury, for among the 27 examples of adoption that we know of in Athens there are indeed 4 cases of the adoption of the SiSo and one of the SiDa.<sup>50)</sup>

There is one other factor to be taken into consideration. As Dover has shown, the relationship with the father and the mother was largely dominated by obedience and respect in Athens.<sup>51)</sup> We may indeed seriously wonder whether among the upper classes of Athens and elsewhere in Greece there can have been much bonding between father and son, since the father was usually out on the streets and left the education of his children to others.<sup>52)</sup> The obligatory respect also extended to the older generation and will have included the father's father. However, the MoFa and MoBr were somewhat outside the family and were therefore able to develop an affectionate relationship with the children of their daughter or sister.<sup>53)</sup> Moreover, since girls married

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49) And. 1.48, cf. Davies, p.30.

50) For the full list, see Gernet (note 7), 129f. The possibility is also mentioned in Is. 1.22; Dem. 40.10. I am indebted for a discussion of these figures to Professor H.T.Wallinga.

51) K.J.Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974) 272-274.

52) For the father-son relationship, see the studies in S.Bertman (ed.), *The Conflict of Generations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Amsterdam 1976); L.L.Nash, *Concepts of Existence: Greek Origins of Generational Thought*, *Daedalus* 1978, no.3(1-21), 9-12; Segal 1982 (note 26), 186.

53) The importance of the MoFa and MoBr being outsiders in the paternal family is also stressed by C.Lévy-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology I* (Harmondsworth 1972) 31-54 and *Réflexions sur l'atome de parenté*, *L'Homme* 13 (1973) 5-30; V.Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Harmondsworth 1974) 105. It is of course not impossible that in occasional cases father and son have a good relationship, whereas normally the good relationship is with the MoBr, but such exceptions can sometimes be satisfactorily explained. For example, H.Teitler, *Ausonius and his Mother's Brother*, *Journ. Indo-European Stud.* 7 (1979) 133-139 suggests that the good relationship of Ausonius with his father falsifies the general rule that such a relationship is unlikely if the one with the MoBr is

young,<sup>54)</sup> the **maternal** uncles would be much closer in age to a boy than his paternal uncles. The MoFa and MoBr were probably also the only males who would have access to the women's quarters when the children were young. Lysias (3.6) says that his sister and nieces lived so *νοκυῖως* that they "are ashamed to be seen even by their male relatives." This must imply that normally the kinsmen, surely her brother(s) and father, could visit her. And the younger Alcibiades was accused of entering his sister's house "not as her brother but as her husband" (Lys. 14.28). It is this difference in attitude between a father and a MoBr which explains why the sage Thales, when asked why he adopted his SiSo but did not have any children of his own, answered, "because I love children!"<sup>55)</sup>

### III

In Greece, then, a boy often had a close relationship with his MoFa and MoBr. Already Radcliffe-Brown, in his seminal article (note 2, 29f.), had observed that the MoBr and MoFa "are the objects of very similar behaviour patterns." This similarity reflected itself also in Greek vocabulary.<sup>56)</sup> The lexicographer Pollux (3.16, 23) mentions a Lallwort *nénnos* for which he gives the meaning "mother's brother and mother's father."<sup>57)</sup> Similar words, such as English *nanna*, "mother's mother," Hungarian *néne*, "sister," or Italian *nino*, "baby boy," occur in many languages all over the world, and nearly always have an overtone of endearment, as surely *nénnos* had in Greece.<sup>58)</sup> The word is never used by high literature but only occurs in lexicographers and inscriptions. The earliest occurrence of *nénnos* we owe to a palmary emendation by Adolf Wilhelm who restored *nénnon*, in stead of the transmitted *néon*, in the epigram that Chrysippos' SiSo had inscribed  
good. However, Ausonius' father was an immigrant in Gaul and therefore probably less integrated into Gaulish society; consequently, he will have spend more time with his own family.

54) For the age of girls at marriage, see S.Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York 1975) 64.

55) Diog. Laert. 1.26; the adoption is also mentioned by Plut. Solon 7.

56) For this reflection on the linguistic level in other Indo-European languages, such as the Latin couple *avus-avunculus*, cf. R.S.P.Beekes, *Uncle and Nephew*, *Journ.Indo-European Stud.* 4 (1976) 43-63; O.Szemerényi, *Das griechische Verwandtschaftsnamensystem vor der Hintergrund des indogermanischen Systems*, *Hermes* 105 (1977) 385-405, esp. 392f.; idem, *Studies in the Kinship Terminology of the Indo-European Languages*, with special references to Indian, Iranian, Greek and Latin, *Acta Iranica* 16 (1977) 1-240, esp. 53ff.

57) *Nénnos* also occurs in IG XII.3.1628; I.Creticae II.XII.5. According to Eustathius (on Il. XIV.118), *nénnos* means paternal and maternal uncle, but in his time the difference between the two uncles had lost its significance in many places, cf. E.Patlagean, *Structure sociale, famille, chrétienté à Byzance* (London 1981) chapter VII, 77-79.

58) For these and many other examples, see L.Ettmüller, *Vaulu-Spá* (Leipzig 1830) 144; W.Oehl, *Indogerm.Forsch.* 57 (1949) 9f.; J.Goody, *On Nannas and Nannies*, *Man* 62 (1962) 179-184; Bremmer (note 5), 67 note 4; L.M.Savoia, *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* III 8 (1978) 698.



on his uncle's statue:<sup>59)</sup>

τὸν νέννον Χρύσιππον Ἀριστοκρέων ἀνέθηκε,  
τῶν Ἀκαδημεϊκῶν στραγγαλίδων κοπίδα

A varia lectio in Pollux (3.16) gives the reading *nónnos*, which survives in modern Greek as "godfather."<sup>60)</sup> Still another variant of *nénnos* is *nánnas* which Hesychius (s.v.) explains as "maternal and paternal uncle," but the related *nánne* only means "maternal aunt" (Hesych. s.v.).<sup>61)</sup> In this case again the popularity will have derived from the close association of the mother with her sister; among the Romans the *matertera* also was the favourite aunt.<sup>62)</sup> *Nónnos*, *nénnos* and *nánnas* (*nánne*) are related to personal names such as *Nonnos*, *Nennaïos*, *Nannion*, *Nanno*, *Nana* and the like,<sup>62)</sup> names which were especially popular in Anatolia, although some of these names owed their existence to the longlasting influence of the Sumero-Akkadian goddess *Nanâ*.<sup>64)</sup> Finally, there are the kinship terms *nín(n)e*, *neïne*, and *próninnos* - terms which are typical for Northern Greece.<sup>65)</sup> They are normally translated as "grandmother", although *próninnos* more likely means "great-grandmother."<sup>66)</sup> In this case, too, however, it would be probably more accurate to translate, "maternal grandmother," since a mother and her own mother are often mentioned

59) Plut. M. 1033a, cf. A.Wilhelm, *Hermes* 35 (1900) 669f. and *Eph.Arch.* 1901,55-58. According to J. and L.Robert, *Bull.Ep.* 1969, no.184: "la correction ... nous paraît s'imposer de façon évidente." The statue is discussed by H.Ingholt, *Aratos and Chrysippos on a Lead Medallion from a Beirut Collection, Berytus* 17 (1968) 143-177.

60) However, in an inscription of Doura-Europos *nónnos* evidently means "father, see F.Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris 1926) I, 310. The female *nóna* occurs in a Christian inscription of Cyzicus: H.Grégoire, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Asie Mineure* I (Paris 1926) no.16.

61) *Nánne* has been recognized by A.Wilhelm, *Griechische Epigramme aus Kreta* (Oslo 1950) 32 in a bad Greek poem (now Peek, *Griech.Versinschr.* 1159) on a boy who had fallen into a pit (for a similar accident, cf. *IG XIV.* 2067; *CIL VI.* 29195; *Theodoretus Hist.Rel.* 2.17); *SEG XII.* 321; J. and L.Robert, *Bull.Ep.* 1965, p.185 also recognized the term on an Egyptian stele to which attention had been drawn by H.Petersen, *CPh* 59 (1964) 170 note 53. For aunts in Greece, note that Dionysos especially reproaches ἀδελφαὶ μητρόε, ἃς ἡμεῖς ἔχομεν (*Eur. Bacch.* 26).

62) Hallett [note 6], chapter IV, who compares i.a. *Persius Sat.* 2.31ff.; *Cic.Div.* 1.47, 104 and *Or.* 2.1.2; add *Passio SS Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 5.3.

63) For these and other examples, see R.Dostálová-Janištová, *Der Name Nonnos*, in *Studia antiqua Antonio Salac septuagenario oblata* (Prague 1955) 102-109; J.M.Hanssens, *Nónnos, nónna et nonnus, nonne*, *Or.Christ.Per.* 26 (1960) 29-41; L.Zgusta, *Kleinasiatische Personennamen* (Prague 1964) §1013; R.Stefanini, *Riflessioni onomastiche su Nannó*, *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo, Classe di Lettere etc.* 104 (1970) 197-201; G.Petzl, *Die Inschriften von Smyrna I* (Bonn 1982) no.106 (on *Nannion*). For the Roman *Nanneiani*, see A.M.Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic* (Columbia/London 1977) 227-230. On *Nanos* as name for *Odysseus*, see N.Horsfall, *CQ* 29 (1979) 381f.

64) G.Azarpay, *The Sumero-Akkadian Nanâ, the goddess of Transoxania*, *Journ. Am.Or.Soc.* 96 (1976) 536-542.

65) *Nín(n)e*: *IG X.2*, 510, 617, 624. *Neïne*: *Bulletin de l'institut archéologique Bulgare* 26 (1963) 149. *Próninnos*: *SEG XXVII.* 277.

together.<sup>67)</sup> In England nanna also typically means the mother's mother.<sup>68)</sup>

The existence of *nénnos* and the absence of a similar word to denote the paternal uncle and grandfather thus confirms what our evidence indicated: in ancient Greece, as among many other peoples, a special relationship existed between the MoFa and MoBr and their DaSo and SiSo. In Western society such relationships no longer exist, but we may recall that our use of the term "uncle" as a term of endearment derives from the Latin *avunculus* "MoBr," and thus still testifies to the special tie that once shaped the life of so many a Greek boy.

#### APPENDIX: SOME PERSIAN EVIDENCE

In addition to the detailed studies of the Roman, Celtic, Germanic (above, note 6), and Greek evidence, I append here the few passages on the MoBr/SiSo relationship in Persia which our classical authors furnish. In his *Cyropaedia* Xenophon mentions Cyrus as having great pleasure in gratifying his MoFa Astyages and his MoBr Cyaxares (1.3.11). His uncle also accompanies Cyrus on the hunt (1.4.7) and is very close to him (2.4.5f.), even though later Cyrus' success makes him jealous (5.5.5ff.). The Lesbian Phainias (fr. 25 Wehrli<sup>2</sup> = Plut. Arist. 9) described the 3 Persian prisoners who Themistocles allegedly sacrificed as the sons of Sandake, the sister of the Persian king. Many centuries later, Procopius (Pers. 1.23) noted that Chosroes cruelly suppressed a conspiracy and "among those killed was even Aspebedes, the brother of his mother"; the murder of the MoBr apparently was the height of cruelty.

However, these passages cannot be taken as unequivocal information about Persian kinship relationships. Although recent research has demonstrated that Xenophon's description of Persian matters is much more trustworthy than he is normally given credit for,<sup>69)</sup> we cannot be sure whether his description of the Cyrus/Cyaxares relationship was not influenced by the Greek MoBr/SiSo relationship. And whatever Phainias and Procopius' value is for the Persian evidence,<sup>70)</sup> they certainly tried to raise the pathos of their Greek readers and thus are additional witnesses for the special position of the maternal uncle in Classical Greece and Early Byzantium.

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66) Cf. *promámme* (LSJ s.v.); Latin *proavus*.

67) P.Michig. 466.44; P.Oxy. 496.5; P.Erlang. 85.10. For these and more examples, see C.Spicq, 'Lois, ta grand'maman' (II Tim., 1 5, Rev.Biblique 84 (1977) 362-364.

68) Cf. Goody (note 58).

69) Cf. H.Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Yaunā en Persai* (Diss.Groningen 1980).

70) Although the name Sandake appears to be Iranian (\*S/Š/Čanda-ka-), as Professor Rüdiger Schmitt (letter 23-7-1982) informs me, the legendary character of Themistocles' sacrifice has now conclusively been shown by A.Henrichs, in *Entretiens Fondation Hardt XXVII* (Geneva 1981) 208-224; for the prisoners being the SiSo's of the Persian king, see Henrichs, 217 note 2.